



**JOINT MEETING
OF THE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MOHAVE ROOMS 1 & 2, 5001 N. SCOTTSDALE ROAD
CHAPARRAL SUITES - CONFERENCE BUILDING
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA 85250
THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2007**

MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT:

Art DeCabooter, MSPC Chair
Erik Filsinger, MSPC Vice-Chair
Joan Fudala, MSPC Commissioner
Melinda Gulick, MSPC Commissioner
Virginia Korte, MSPC Commissioner
Gerry Miller, MSPC Commissioner
Arnold Roy, MSPC Commissioner
Tom Silverman, MSPC Commissioner
Linda Whitehead, MSPC Commissioner
Solange Whitehead, MSPC Commissioner
John Holdsworth, Vice-Chair, TDC
Tom Morrow, TDC Commissioner
Sally Shaffer, TDC Commissioner
Mike Surguine, TDC Commissioner
Gordon Zuckerman, TDC Commissioner

ABSENT:

Rand Hubbell, MSPC Commissioner
Kate Cavaliere, TDC Commissioner

STAFF PRESENT:

Bob Cafarella, McDowell Sonoran Preserve Director
Don Meserve, Preservation Planner
Claire Miller, McDowell Sonoran Preserve Manager
Lisa Gurtler, Financial Services
Craig Clifford, Financial Services General Manager
Kathy Carlisle-O'Connor, Tourism Department Manager
Lee Guillory, Financial Services

ALSO PRESENT:

Wayne Ecton, Council Member
Martha Ecton
Carla, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, Executive Director
Ruthie Carl, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, Managing Director

Dan Gruber
Frank Jacobson
Brent DeRaad
Lesley Wright

1. **CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Vice-Chair Holdsworth called the joint meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. Roll call and introductions indicated members and guests present as stated above.

2. **Discussion/Possible Recommendations to City Council - Desert Discovery Center Concept, Next Steps and Business Plan**

Vice-Chair Holdsworth invited the Commissions to consider the draft plan for the DDC, discuss key issues of concern, and gather thoughts on how these issues should be addressed. The goal is to gain consensus on what recommendations need to be made to the City Council to move the project forward. The allocation of space for the facility, the content and amenities to be made available, and the educational and entertainment elements of the project are to be considered. Chair DeCabooter added that the purpose of the joint meeting was not to take action, but to allow the Commissioners to express their concerns and comments.

Vice-Chair Filsinger requested a clear mission statement of the DDC in order to select the plan that best fit the description. Commissioner Silverman read the DDC mission statement as:

"The Desert Discovery Center, the gateway to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, would exist to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to discover the story of the upper Sonoran Desert. Through environmental experiences presented in a natural setting, the DDC will inspire learning about the desert through its programs which encourage preservation and instills a sense of harmony with and respect for the desert."

Vice-Chair Holdsworth noted that there have been concerns about the physical contents of the DDC and asked for a detailed description of the proposed characteristics. Commissioner Silverman responded that the plan calls for a 15,000 square foot building. All activities will take place within the building with the exception of the four trails that connect to the facility. Two amphitheaters will seat 400 and 75 persons respectively.

Commissioner Fudala opined that clarification was needed to define how the Gateway project and the DDC would function together.

Commissioner Korte said that the Commissions have not explored the DDC's full potential and inquired whether a study has identified what the community at large is looking for in such a facility. Vice-Chair Holdsworth responded that there has not been

a user study asking both residents and visitors what they want out of the Preserve, though a study commissioned by the CVB in September of 2005 showed that tourists ranked desert activities third among desired pursuits.

Commissioner Korte asked if presenting the draft proposal to the City Council was appropriate without first having conducted a marketing study. Commissioner Silverman said the immediate goal is to keep the project moving. The next step is to hire appropriate consultants to refine the project. He opined that without forward momentum, the project would likely stagnate.

Commissioner Miller opined that the project cannot move ahead without the concept reflecting all the changes that the City and the Preserve have witnessed since the plan was first introduced. Commissioner Silverman responded that the purpose of the joint meeting was to define that concept.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead expressed admiration for the draft proposal, noting it identifies and targets all the key groups that have expressed interest in the Preserve. The plan, as formulated, takes into account the interests of each group without impacting any of the other user groups. Professional consultation could possibly identify additional groups whose interests can be addressed in later refinements. Additionally, the DDC expands upon the activities allowed in the Preserve, which benefits tourism.

Commissioner Morrow opined that to present the plan before hiring a consultant would be to act prematurely.

Vice-Chair Holdsworth stated that the purpose of the joint meeting was not to address the details of the project, but to arrive at a consensus on what steps need to be recommended to the City Council in order to move the project forward.

Vice-Chair Filsinger said that a distinct difference of opinion exists that needs to be addressed. One approach is relatively low-key, viewing the DDC as complementary to the Preserve, while others that see it as an attraction in its own right.

Commissioner Linda Whitehead noted that the MSPC has largely agreed that the principal attraction is the Preserve itself. The desert experience and the proposed activities of the DDC appeal to a broad range of people.

Commissioner Silverman noted that the MSPC is justifiably concerned about what activities will occur inside the Preserve, while the TDC sees the Preserve as an opportunity to add a unique attraction to Scottsdale. The views need to be balanced out if the project is to proceed. He added that the draft is a work in progress, and is not set in stone.

Commissioner Gulick proposed that the City Council be asked if it would support marketing and feasibility studies. She also suggested that a joint task force, formed from members of the MSPC and TDC, be created to oversee the studies.

Vice-Chair Holdsworth clarified that the City Council is asking the MSPC and the TDC for input in concert with Financial Services' business plan. He opined that this provided the Commissions with an opportunity to guide the Council on issues of importance.

Chair DeCabooter proposed that one recommendation be to hire a specialized consultant to determine what residents and visitors want from the DDC. Commissioner Silverman noted that the report recommends such a study.

In response to Commissioner Surguine's inquiry, Vice-Chair Holdsworth responded that the Council expects the Commissions to provide proposals for any funding concerns. Commissioner Surguine further inquired how the deficit in the proposed budget would be funded. Commissioner Silverman responded that an endowment will need to be raised, using private and public sector money, to adequately finance the building and operation of the facility. He added that some private funds are available but that additional money will be needed. Vice-Chair Holdsworth added that the TDC generally supports the DDC, but that no requests for funding have been formally presented.

Commissioner Solange Whitehead concurred with the need for a marketing study, but cautioned the Commissions not to ignore the opinions that have been gathered to date. The existing document reflects a delicate balance between all the Preserve's current user groups.

Mr. Jacobson opined that the Learning Center is for people who have never set foot in a pristine desert. It represents a great opportunity to illustrate the climatology, geography, geology, flora, and fauna of the desert in all four seasons. The DDC would fill a role between a museum/botanical garden and the desert itself. Care needs to be taken to hire the right professional consultant.

Commissioner Miller opined that the Commissions are delving too deeply into the details of a business plan that could change drastically as the plan progresses. Vice-Chair Filsinger noted the variance of opinions, and concurred that more consensus is necessary. Vice-Chair Holdsworth said the report can be submitted as is, while noting the varying views. Opinions can be revisited once the results of the study are in. Following further discussion, Commissioner Gulick noted the lack of consensus on the governance of the DDC. Vice-Chair Holdsworth opined that it would be preferable to admit that no consensus presently exists on governance than to rush a decision that serves nobody well. He suggested that the Commissions update the Mayor and City Council on the DDC, but not make recommendations until additional input is received from the specialized consultant.

Vice-Chair Holdsworth responded to Commissioner Surguine's inquiry saying a recommendation needs to be made to the City Council that funding be allocated for any potential studies.

In response to Commissioner Shaffer's inquiry, Vice-Chair Holdsworth responded that the TDC had contingency funds available to partially fund a study, but that an action item would have to be added to the agenda to approve allocating resources to it. Chair DeCabooter responded that the MSPC's funds are restricted mainly to acquisitions and construction, and doubted that they could be made available to contribute to funding the study.

Mr. Clifford reminded the Commissioners that the draft plan is a work in progress and with the City Council's help can finally move forward. After additional discussion, the Commissions reached consensus on the need for a marketing study, a feasibility study, and the formation of a Joint TDC/MSPC Task Force to oversee them.

3. **Commissioner Comments and Public Comments**

The Commissioners expressed admiration for the idea of the DDR, and the business plan that was created for it. Vice-Chair Holdsworth noted that in addition to the joint recommendation, the City Council expects each Commission to make recommendations separately.

Mr. Clifford said that the January 23 presentation is the first opportunity to bring information on the DDC before the City Council. The City Manager asked the Planning Committee to prepare the draft plan so the DDR concept can be better understood by all parties. The plan reflects the Commissions' discussions to date.

Councilman Ecton opined the importance of presenting the draft plan to the Council in order to determine enthusiasm for the project and garner support to move forward. The Council's opinion needs to be gauged before any more money is spent. He added that in general there appears to be more agreement than disagreement between the Commissions.

Dan Gruber commented that the previous work should be provided as input to the new consultants, but that earlier work should not constrain the new research.

Carla opined that the project would never move forward as long as new issues were continually introduced at each discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the joint meeting was adjourned at 6:57 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
A/V Tronics, Inc.